

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do we celebrate the funeral rites?

During the funeral rite we pray for the deceased, entrusting them to God's mercy and care. We celebrate the funeral Mass for both the dead and the living and comfort them in their grief.

How many parts make up the funeral rites?

There are three main parts:

- the Vigil Service – Ritual prayers usually held during or just before the visitation at the Funeral Home
- the Funeral Liturgy (with or without Mass) – always celebrated in the church
- the Rite of Committal – (or Final Farewell) at the cemetery or graveside.

Besides these, other rites are provided, e.g., prayers just after death, prayers at the beginning of a visitation and prayers for transferring the body to the church.

Why have a viewing?

It provides a sense of closure and allows family member who were not present at the time of death to express their last goodbyes. It also allows friends and extended family an opportunity to express their support and condolences. Viewings (or wake services) are held at the funeral home. They are not held in our church.

Does the body of the deceased have to be present at the Mass?

During "The Mass of Christian Burial," the technical name for a funeral Mass, either the body or cremated remains must be present for the Mass. A *Memorial Mass* for the deceased may be celebrated at any time where there is *no* presence of the body or cremains.

Is there an average length of time between death, cremation and the funeral Mass?

The answer depends on various factors, just as in the case of funerals with the body. The place of death, the location of the crematory, scheduling a time for cremation, the church schedule, and other circumstances will all impact the timing.

THE FUNERAL MASS / LITURGY

What are the symbols used during the Funeral Mass and what do they represent?

- The *Easter Candle* reminds the faithful of Christ's undying presence among them and his victory over sin and death. The candle is placed near the casket to indicate that the death of a Christian is one's own Passover.
- *Holy Water* reminds the assembly of the saving waters of baptism.
- *Incense* is used as a sign to honor the body of the deceased, of the community's prayers for the deceased rising to the throne of God, and as a sign of farewell.
- The *Pall* is a reminder of the baptismal garment of the deceased and a sign of Christian dignity. The use of the pall signifies that all are equal in God's eyes.
- A *Bible* placed on the casket is a sign that Christians live by the word of God and that fidelity to the Word leads to eternal life.
- A *Cross* placed on the casket is a reminder that we are marked by the cross in baptism and through Jesus' suffering, our loved one is brought to his resurrection.

My loved one has always read from the Jerusalem Bible. Can we choose readings from that version?

Unfortunately, no. The only bible version permitted to be used in Catholic liturgy is the New American Bible. All readings contained in this funeral packet are taken from that Bible version.

Are eulogies permitted during Mass?

Normally individual tributes (*eulogies*) are reserved for the wake service at the funeral home and the informal gathering following the funeral. The *homily* takes its theme from the readings and speaks of the Catholic belief in the Resurrection. During the homily, Father will preach on the gospel chosen and make specific references to the deceased. *Words of Remembrance* (no more than 4 minutes long) may be read by one friend/family member from the ambo before the final blessing. These should be a brief word of thanksgiving for the life of the deceased. It is best prepared, written down, and sent to the church office in advance. Words of Remembrance are optional.

Can a flag be substituted for the funeral pall over the casket during the Liturgy? What about flowers on the casket?

No, the casket should be covered with the white pall as a reminder of baptism. Flowers are not permitted to remain on the casket during the funeral Liturgy. Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the casket during the liturgy. Any national flags or flags of associations to which the deceased belonged are removed from the casket at the entrance of the church and may be replaced when the casket is removed from the church.

We wish to create a funeral program? Does the Church provide that service or can they help us with that?

Some families choose to create a funeral program showing the order of the Mass, the reading and musical choices and sometimes a poem or prayer on the back. We do not provide that service, however if you are interested, we can provide examples to assist you or a family member.

Our dad loved "Danny Boy". Can it be played during his funeral Mass?

Music is an integral part of the funeral Mass. It has the power to console and uplift. Although you may be partial to a secular song which brings comfort in its own right, all liturgical music selections are taken from our hymnal. No secular music of any kind may be sung or played before, during or after Mass. We suggest those songs for the funeral home or the reception following burial.

REGARDING CREMATION

Is cremation permitted by the Catholic Church?

The Church has permitted cremation since 1963. The Church prefers that the body be present for the Liturgy and cremated following Mass; however, it is possible to celebrate the Funeral Liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains. All of the usual rites celebrated with a casket are also celebrated in the presence of the cremains. The cremated remains are treated with the same dignity and respect as the body.

What kind of container is appropriate?

Worthy containers such as classic funeral urns are appropriate. Keeping the ashes in pieces of jewelry or other objects are unacceptable practices. The body of the deceased is then to be buried (interment) or entombed in a mausoleum. These practices demonstrate Christian faith in awaiting the resurrection.

Your loved one has been cremated before the Funeral Mass. How does a Mass with cremains differ from a funeral Mass with casket?

A covered table will be set up with a funeral cloth in the area immediately in front of the sanctuary. The table has enough room for the urn and usually a small vase or ring of flowers. A small (5x7) picture of your loved one may be displayed. Since the urn is the focus, large pictures and photo boards should be displayed at the funeral home or the luncheon following the burial. They are not permitted in church.

We have cremated our loved one. Can we keep the ashes at home on the mantel?

When cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, i.e. in a cemetery or in an area set aside for this purpose. A common practice is the entombment of the cremated remains in a "columbarium" – an arrangement of niches, either in a mausoleum, a room or wall into which an urn or other worthy vessel is placed for permanent memorial.

The USCCB Committee on Divine Worship Newsletter states: “The reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten or their remains from being shown a lack of respect and prevents any superstitious practices. For these reasons, *the conservation of the ashes in a domestic residence is not permitted.*”

Our loved one was an outdoorsman. Can we scatter the ashes in the mountains or at sea?

The practice of scattering the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way, is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires, nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry and other objects, nor may they be divided or separated. (Order of Christian Funerals)

OTHER QUESTIONS

Many of our friends and relatives are not Catholic. Should I still have a Mass for our loved one?

Yes, especially if the deceased was a baptized Catholic. It is common today that guests gathered for funerals are of varied faiths or do not identify with any faith or religion. We celebrate the funeral Mass not only for the dead but also for the living and provide comfort in their grief.

May Catholics who have been divorced and remarried outside the Church have a Funeral Mass?

Yes, they too are entrusted to God’s love and these actions do not exclude them from a Catholic Funeral Mass.

What rites can be used for miscarried or stillborn children?

“Funeral Rites may be celebrated for children whose parents intended them to be Baptized but who died before Baptism. In these celebrations the Christian community entrusts the child to God’s all-embracing love.” (Order of Christian Funeral #237)

What rites can be used for a suicide victim?

Even suicide victims are entrusted to God’s love and mercy and therefore entitled to a Funeral Mass.

May a person donate organs?

The donation of organs has become commonplace and is allowed. The donation of the entire body for scientific study is also permitted. In these instances, the proper disposition of the body is to be done according to accepted practices.

Why is a grave the preferred site for the Rite of Committal?

The grave (tomb) is preferred because the prayers from the ritual express the finality of placing the body or remains in the ground or tomb.

What is a graveside service?

A graveside service is a funeral service held at the gravesite at a cemetery. A graveside service can follow a traditional funeral or can be a stand-alone event. It's a type of service that can be held for either burial or interment of cremated remains.

Must a Catholic be buried in a Catholic Cemetery?

Normally, a Catholic is buried in a Catholic cemetery; however, your loved one may be buried in another cemetery and a non-Catholic may be buried in a Catholic cemetery with Catholic family members.

DONATIONS

Instead of flowers, can we have donations sent to the church in Dad's name?

Families often designate an organization or charity meaningful to their loved one for memorial donations. You may wish to encourage friends and family to make donations to our churches. These gifts are received in the name of your loved one and the immediate family is notified. These gifts may be used for the general needs of the church or may be designated for a specific purpose. Please let the funeral director know of your intention so that the obituary may reflect your wishes.

How should bequests to parishes be made?

If donors want our parish to benefit from their generosity, they should word their wills so that the bequest is clearly directed to the church itself, either St. Agnes or St. Matthias Catholic Church.

AFTER THE FUNERAL

My loved one is now passed. The funeral is over and everyone has gone home. Where can I go for support?

Our parish provides a Bereavement Support Group which meets for 6 week sessions several times per year. If you are interested in this program, please call the parish office for the next meeting time.

November 2nd is the Feast of All Souls. On that day, we remember as a church family those who have left us during the past year. We invite you to join us as we remember your loved one during that Mass. Please mark your calendar and plan to join us.

Blessed are they who mourn, they shall be consoled. Matthew 5:3